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Promoting historical contextualisation in classrooms: an observational study

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this observational study is to explore how history teachers promote historical contextualisation in their lessons. Historical contextualisation is the ability to situate phenomena and individuals' actions in the context of time, historical location, long-term developments, or specific events to give meaning to these phenomena and actions. Using the *Framework for Analysing the Teaching of Historical Contextualisation* (FAT-HC), five trained raters observed eight history teachers twice. To further analyse the observation scores, the FAT-HC items were divided into eight categories while distinguishing between items that demonstrate historical contextualisation and items focusing on engaging students in historical contextualisation processes. The results indicate that the teachers in the sample did not explicitly promote historical contextualisation in their lessons. No teacher obtained a mean FAT-HC score >2.00 on a four-point scale. The teachers mainly demonstrated historical contextualisation, while engaging students in historical contextualisation processes was observed far less often. The findings can be used to help teachers formulate domain-specific instruction to promote students' ability to perform historical contextualisation.



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An important goal of modern Western history education is the teaching of historical reasoning competencies, such as examining change and continuity, asking historical questions, and performing historical contextualisation (Counsell, Burn, and Chapman 2016; Seixas 2015; Wineburg 2001). Students not only have to possess historical content knowledge but also need to reason with this knowledge. In many countries, historical reasoning competencies therefore comprise a large part of the formal history curriculum (Erdmann and Hasberg 2011). To acquire historical reasoning competencies, students need to be actively engaged in domain-specific learning processes, such as working with historical sources, determining causes and consequences, and engaging in historical contextualisation (e.g. Lévesque 2008; Seixas and Morton 2013; Van Drie and Van Boxtel 2008). History teachers therefore play a key role in teaching students how to examine historical phenomena within the confines of the discipline (Bain and Mirel 2006; VanSledright 2011).

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In this study, we focus on how historical contextualisation is promoted in classrooms. Historical contextualisation is considered an essential skill for historians (e.g. Gaddis 2002; Sewell Jr 2005), a key component of historical thinking and reasoning (e.g. Seixas and Morton 2013; Van Drie and Van Boxtel 2008; Wineburg 2001), and a possible contributor to instilling democratic citizenship in students (e.g. Barton 2012; Barton and Levstik 2004; McCully 2012). The Dutch formal history curriculum therefore considers the ability to perform historical contextualisation important (Board of Examinations 2017). Moreover, Nikitina (2006) argues that the ability to perform historical contextualisation is also important in other school subjects (e.g. when teaching the scientific development of the atomic bomb in science classrooms or when discussing Mark Twain's novel *Huckleberry Finn* in English classrooms).

Despite the importance of historical contextualisation, different studies indicate that students experience difficulties when asked to perform historical contextualisation tasks (Foster, Ashby, and Lee 2008; Huijgen et al. 2014; Wineburg 2001). Students may be inclined to view the past from a present-oriented perspective, and this is considered one of the main reasons that students fail to achieve historical contextualisation, resulting in the misunderstanding of historical phenomena (Lee and Ashby 2001; Seixas and Peck 2004). For example, some students cannot explain why someone voted for the Nazi Party of Hitler in the 1930s (Hartmann and Hasselhorn 2008) or why forced marriages took place in the fifteenth century (Angvik & Von Borries, 1997) due to a present-oriented perspective. History teachers should therefore explicitly teach students historical contextualisation (Lévesque 2008).

However, little is known about the extent to which history teachers demonstrate historical contextualisation themselves in their history lessons and how they engage students in historical contextualisation processes. Previous observational studies focused more on general history teachers' classroom behaviour. For example, Van Hover, Hicks, and Cotton (2012) included general history teachers' instructional practices, such as writing, simulations, and discussion, in their developed observation instrument. Nokes (2010) developed and used an observation instrument to examine history teachers' practices but focused on their literacy-related decisions, such as the texts they used, as well as activities and instruction they provided in association with various types of texts. Huijgen et al. (2017b) developed the *Framework for Analysing the Teaching of Historical Contextualisation* (FAT-HC), which is a more specific observation instrument. However, they focused on the reliability of the instrument and did not present any results on how history teachers promoted historical contextualisation in classrooms. The aim of this study is therefore to build upon the work of Huijgen et al. (2017b) and to explore how teachers promote historical contextualisation in their classrooms using the FAT-HC.

Theoretical framework

Historical contextualisation

The ability to perform historical contextualisation has become important in Dutch history education (Van Boxtel and Van Drie 2012). Since the implementation of a framework of overview knowledge (consisting of 10 historical periods with associated key features) in the Netherlands in 2007, students have to use this framework to

contextualise historical events, agents' actions, and sources to explain, compare, or evaluate them (Board of Examinations 2017; Wilschut 2012).

Some studies define historical contextualisation as one heuristic that can be applied (in addition to corroboration and sourcing) to examine historical sources (e.g. Britt and Aglinskias 2002; Wineburg 1998). However, in history education, it is possible to contextualise historical agents' actions, historical events, or historical sources (Havekes et al. 2012). Therefore, in this study, we use the definition of Van Boxtel and Van Drie (2012) and conceptualise historical contextualisation as an activity in which one situates phenomena and people's actions in the context of time, historical locations, long-term developments, or specific events to explain, compare, or evaluate these phenomena and actions. Huijgen et al. (2017b) distinguished four interrelated components of historical contextualisation: (1) reconstructing the historical context; (2) enhancing historical empathy; (3) using knowledge of the historical context to explain historical phenomena; and (4) enhancing the awareness of present-oriented perspectives among students when examining the past.

Reconstruction of a historical context needs to consider chronological, spatial, sociopolitical, socio-economic, and sociocultural frames of reference (De Keyser and Vandepitte 1998). The chronological frame includes knowledge of time periods and chronological knowledge of significant events and developments. The spatial frame focuses on knowledge of (geographical) locations and scales, and the social frames include knowledge of human behaviour and the social conditions of life, as well as knowledge of economic and political developments. When students do not consider these frames of reference, they are often not able to explain, compare, or evaluate historical phenomena and historical agents' actions (Reisman and Wineburg 2008). For example, to understand and explain the Valais witch trials between 1428 and 1447, students need to situate these witch hunts in the isolated and mountainous border region of France and Switzerland during the late Middle Ages (chronological and spatial context). Furthermore, students have to consider that this region endured a civil war from 1415 to 1419, that the clans of the nobility fought each other, and that society was in a state of heightened tension (political, economic, and cultural context).

When historical empathy is used to promote historical contextualisation, it can be seen as an interplay between an affective and cognitive element. The affective element is that students need to consider how historical agents' lived experiences, situations, or actions may have been influenced by their affective response based on a connection made to one's own similar yet different life experiences (Endacott and Brooks 2013). A more cognitive element is that students need to examine the role and position of a historical agent, which includes understanding another's prior lived experience, principles, positions, attitudes, and beliefs (Hartmann and Hasselhorn 2008).

Students should not only reconstruct the historical context of a historical phenomenon, but this context should also be used to construct or evaluate a historical reasoning (Van Drie and Van Boxtel 2008). Historical contextualisation becomes meaningful when it helps to explain historical phenomena, make comparisons, or understand processes of change and continuity (Van Boxtel and Van Drie 2016). Students should therefore be engaged in tasks in which historical contextualisation is needed to explain, compare, or evaluate historical phenomena and historical agents' actions.

A final component of historical contextualisation is raising awareness of students' present-oriented perspectives or presentism. Viewing the past from a present-oriented perspective leads to the misunderstanding of historical phenomena and agents' actions (Lévesque 2008; Wineburg 2001). Students therefore have to become aware of the differences between the past and present and evaluate the past on its own terms (Seixas and Morton 2013).

Students' ability to perform historical contextualisation

Compared to adults, elementary and secondary school students experience difficulty adopting a perspective that is different from their own, especially when this perspective is not consistent with the knowledge they have (Birch and Bloom 2007). In history education, where students must be aware that people in the past may not have had the same information that the students possess now, this may lead to a misunderstanding of historical events (Seixas and Peck 2004). For example, this could result in viewing historical agents as "stupid" or "that they did not know any better" (Lee and Ashby 2001).

Different studies have focused on how students perform historical contextualisation. Hartmann and Hasselhorn (2008) examined how 170 German tenth graders performed historical contextualisation to explain a historical agent's decision. Most students (66%) in their sample obtained a moderate score on the ability to explain a historical agent's decision, 24% obtained a very high score and 10% obtained a very low score. Huijgen et al. (2014) used the same task to examine how 1270 Dutch upper elementary and secondary school students (ranging in age from 10 to 17 years) performed historical contextualisation. They concluded that older students achieved higher scores than younger students. This finding also appeared in a study by Berti, Baldin, and Toneatti (2009), who interviewed a total of 150 students (8–25 years old) to examine the concept of ordeals among children and young adults.

Recently, studies also have focused on how students' ability to perform historical contextualisation can be advanced. Huijgen et al. (2017a) found indicators that secondary school students (15- and 16-year olds) who combined different frames of reference were more successful in explaining historical agents' decisions. Baron (2016) concluded that a visual coding system based on the use of reliable visual cues to establish a historical time period may help students contextualise historical documents. Van Boxtel and Van Drie (2012) found that students between the ages of 14 and 17 who connected images or textual elements with key historical concepts or knowledge of landmarks were able to create a historical context of historical images and documents with greater success.

Teaching historical contextualisation

Not much is, however, known about how history teachers promote historical contextualisation in classrooms. Seixas (1998) found that pre-service history teachers incorporated documents in their lesson plans that showed that thinking in the past differed to present thinking. However, different studies on history teacher classroom behaviour convey the general image of a teacher who mostly uses the history

textbook narratives and focuses on the transmission of historical content knowledge (Barton and Levstik 2003; Saye & SSIRC, 2013). This “traditional” approach of history education appears to focus on students’ ability to memorise (nationally) significant figures, events and narratives (Carretero, Asensio, and Rodriguez-Moneo 2012; Symcox and Wilschut 2009).

Huijgen et al. (2017b) developed and tested a domain-specific observation instrument focusing on historical contextualisation called the FAT-HC. Their instrument was based on four teaching strategies on historical contextualisation. The first strategy is reconstructing the historical context. Students need to possess historical context knowledge, including knowledge about chronology and spatial, and socio-economic, socio-cultural, and sociopolitical developments before they can perform historical contextualisation successfully. The second strategy is increasing historical empathy – for example, by selecting a historical agent relevant to the topic under study and focusing on the role and position of the historical agent in society and promoting students’ affective connections with the historical agent. The third strategy is enhancing the use of historical context knowledge. Not only do students have to reconstruct a historical context, they also must use it, for example, to determine causes and consequences, compare historical phenomena and understand different perspectives on phenomena. The final strategy is enhancing the awareness of present-oriented perspectives among students when examining the past. Without the awareness of the differences between past and present, students are not able to compare, explain, or evaluate the past. These teaching strategies can be applied in different (chronological) sequences in classrooms.

The FAT-HC can be used to examine how students are engaged in historical contextualisation processes since it makes a distinction between items focusing on teachers *demonstrating* historical contextualisation (e.g. the teacher gives time indicators) and items focusing on teachers *engaging* students in historical contextualisation processes (e.g. the students give time indicators). When the teacher gives time indicators, the teacher mentions, for example, the year or historical period in which a historical event took place. When the students give time indicators, teachers ask students, for example, in which year or historical period a historical event took place. The focus of the FAT-HC is therefore on teacher behaviour.

Huijgen et al. (2017b) used generalisability theory (e.g. Brennan 2001; Shavelson and Webb 1991) to test the observation instrument for reliability. They calculated an index of dependability coefficient (Φ) to determine the number of observed lessons and raters needed for a reliable observation score. Brennan and Kane (1977) argued that the Φ should be $\geq .7$ for research purposes; in the Huijgen et al. (2017b) study, the Φ was .74 when one lesson was observed by two raters and the Φ increased to .86 when one lesson was observed by five raters. However, Huijgen et al. (2017b) did not use the instrument to examine how history teachers promote historical contextualisation in classrooms, leaving important questions for educational professionals unanswered, such as “Which teaching strategies from the instruments do teachers use the most?” and “Do teachers only demonstrate historical contextualisation or do they also engage students in historical contextualisation processes?”

Research question and hypotheses

For this study, we formulated the following research question: how do history teachers promote historical contextualisation in their lessons? We focus in this observational study on the two highest tracks in the Dutch educational system (general higher secondary education and pre-university education) since the formal Dutch history exam programme of these educational tracks demands that students examine the differences between past and present and create a historical context when interpreting historical events (Board of Examinations 2017). Moreover, we focus on students aged 14–17 years old because these students possess the historical content knowledge necessary to perform historical contextualisation successfully

To examine the research question, we formulated the following two hypotheses:

1. Since historical contextualisation is considered a key component of historical thinking and reasoning and is included in the Dutch formal history curriculum, we expect that the teachers in our sample will demonstrate historical contextualisation in their lessons.

2. Since research indicates that many teachers focus on the transmission of historical content knowledge, we expect that the teachers in our sample seldom encourage their students to engage in historical contextualisation processes themselves.

Method

To answer our research question, we used systematic observational measurement (Suen and Ary 2014; Yoder and Symons 2010). This approach allowed us to examine the data within the situation in which the activities took place (i.e. the classroom). Other methods, such as interviews, student and teacher questionnaires, or self-reports, did not offer this option (George and Bennett 2004). Moreover, despite its labour-intensive nature, classroom observation is viewed as a more unbiased form of data collection to examine teacher behaviour compared to other methods (Pianta and Hamre 2009). This is stressed by VanSledright, Kelly, and Meuwissen (2006, 220), who argue that teachers in interviews often talk about “idealised versions of practice” instead of what actually happens in their classrooms.

Research context

In the Netherlands, students receive elementary education from ages 4 to 12. They are educated in, for example, history, writing, reading, geography, and science. Around age 12, children transition from elementary education to secondary education. There are three educational tracks in secondary education. Approximately 60% of the students continue on to pre-vocational schools (duration of 4 years), 20% receive a general higher secondary education (duration of 5 years), and 20% receive a pre-university education (duration of 6 years). The determination is based on the advice of the elementary school and is supported by a mandatory standardised test.

For our research, we focus on general higher secondary education and pre-university education since the ability to perform historical contextualisation is not explicitly mentioned in the pre-vocational history exam programme. History is a mandatory subject in

the first 3 years of general higher secondary education and pre-university education. After 3 years, history becomes an elective subject. Generally, in higher secondary education, approximately 65% of the students take the final history exam, and in pre-university education, approximately 50% of the students take the exam (Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development 2016). The educational quality of all elementary and secondary schools is monitored by the Dutch Inspection of Education.

Sample

We asked eight history teachers from our professional network to participate in our study. To explore the possible differences between teachers, we wanted the sample to be as varied as possible with respect to gender, age, and work experience as a history teacher. The teachers participated voluntarily in the study, and all had Dutch nationality. The teachers were not informed of the purpose of the research but were only asked for permission to videotape two of their lessons. The gender distribution in the Netherlands of teachers is 48% female and 52% male (Statistics Netherlands 2014). Each teacher was from a different school (six schools are in the northern part of the Netherlands, and two schools are in the central part of the Netherlands). Table 1 presents an overview of the teachers' characteristics.

Observation instrument

For each teacher, two lessons were videotaped, yielding a total of 16 different lessons. We used videotaped records because this allowed for stop-and-go coding and repeated viewing of key scenes (Yoder and Symons 2010). All lessons were given in the two highest educational tracks of the Dutch educational system. We chose to use the FAT-HC to observe the videotaped lessons. The FAT-HC is developed and tested for reliability by Huijgen et al. (2017b) and focuses on observing how history teachers promote historical contextualisation in classrooms. The FAT-HC is modelled on Van De Grift's (2007) *International Comparative Analysis of Learning and Teaching* (ICALT) high-inference observation instrument. The FAT-HC comprises 40 items and utilises a four-point Likert scale to score the items, where 1 = weak, 2 = more weak than strong, 3 = more strong than weak, and 4 = strong. Observers have to provide a qualitative verdict of an item based on the whole lesson. Similar to the ICALT instrument, scores of 1 and 2 represent a

Table 1. Teachers' characteristics.

Teacher*	Gender	Educational qualification	Age	Years of work experience	Schools' student enrolment
John	Male	Bachelors	60	37	<250
Mark	Male	Masters	34	8	>1000
Nick	Male	Masters	43	17	>1000
Bob	Male	Masters	63	41	>1000
Dylan	Male	Masters	41	14	>1000
Lisa	Female	Masters	45	22	>1000
Anna	Female	Masters	30	5	>1000
Kim	Female	Masters	27	1	>1000

*Names are pseudonyms.

negative verdict, while scores of 3 and 4 represent a positive verdict. The items of the FAT-HC are included in Appendix A.

To analyse the lesson observations more specifically, we divided the 40 FAT-HC items into eight categories (see Table 2). The categories were based on four teaching strategies: (1) reconstructing an adequate historical context; (2) enhancing historical empathy; (3) using the historical context to explain historical events; and (4) raising awareness of the consequences of a present-oriented perspective when examining the past. To examine our hypothesis that history teachers might not engage students in the process of contextualisation, we made a distinction for the *reconstructing the historical context*, *enhancing historical empathy* and *using the historical context to explain historical events* strategies between items that demonstrate historical contextualisation and items that engage students in historical contextualisation processes.

This distinction can be seen in the FAT-HC of Huijgen et al. (2017b) because the items starting with “The teacher...” demonstrate historical contextualisation, while items starting with “The students...” implies that students are engaged in historical contextualisation. An example of an item that demonstrates historical contextualisation is “The teacher discusses the economic circumstances at the time of the phenomena”. This item only includes the explaining of the economic circumstances by the teacher, but there is no classroom interaction with the students. An example of an item that engages students in historical contextualisation is “The students explain the economic circumstances at the time of the phenomena”. This item does include an interaction between the teacher and students because the teacher, for example, asks students to describe or research the economic circumstances.

We created a separate category for the items “The teacher does not use anachronisms” (FAT-HC item 36) and “The teacher does not present the past as progress” (FAT-HC item 37) since the mean scores of these items were very high (indicating that teachers almost never used anachronisms and presented the past as progress) and therefore did not display a representative and nuanced image of the category *raising awareness of present-oriented perspectives*. The categories *Not using anachronism and presenting the past as progress* and *Raising awareness of present-oriented perspectives* only focus on demonstrating historical contextualisation according to the FAT-HC (all these items start with “The teacher...”). No distinction could therefore be made for these categories

Table 2. Categories and accompanying FAT-HC items (Huijgen et al. 2017b).

Categories	FAT-HC items
1. Reconstructing the historical context (teacher demonstrates)	1–13
2. Reconstructing the historical context (teacher activates)	14–21
3. Enhancing historical empathy (teacher demonstrates)	22–24
4. Enhancing historical empathy (teacher activates)	25–27
5. Using the historical context to explain historical events (teacher demonstrates)	28–31
6. Using the historical context to explain historical events (teacher activates)	32–35
7. Not using anachronisms and presenting the past as progress	36–37
8. Raising awareness of present-oriented perspectives	38–40

between items that demonstrate historical contextualisation and items that engage students in historical contextualisation.

Observers

We trained five observers (three male and two female history teachers ranging in age from 29 to 33 years and having 7 to 8 years of work experience as history teachers) to each observe the videotaped history lessons. We used multiple observers because research indicates increased reliability when using two or more observers for the same lesson when using the FAT-HC (Huijgen et al. 2017b). The observers were selected from the professional network of the authors and participated voluntarily in the study. They all held the Dutch nationality and a master's degree in history education.

All observers received 4 hours of training in the use of the FAT-HC. Three videotaped history lessons taught by three different history teachers were used as training material. These lessons were not used in our data analyses. The observers received an introduction and explanation of the FAT-HC items and evaluated the videotaped lessons using a training version of the observation instrument that included more in-depth explanations of the items. After the observers observed each videotaped lesson, their results were discussed, and some items were clarified by the trainers to minimise inter-rater bias. The items "The teacher creates historical tension (the past as different)", "The teacher moves the self into the past (if I...)", and "The teacher outlines a recognisable role for students to foster historical empathy (as a businessman/like a father)" needed the most clarification.

Data analysis

First, to examine the extent to which the history teachers promoted historical contextualisation, we calculated the observers' mean FAT-HC score for each lesson. Intraclass Correlations Coefficients (ICCs) were also calculated to explore the inter-rater consistency between the five observers. Since we worked in this study with mean observations scores, we used the average measures ICCs (cf. McGraw and Wong 1996). Koo and Li (2016) define ICCs between .50 and .75 as moderate reliability, between .75 and .90 as good reliability and ICCs greater than .90 as excellent reliability. Next, based on two lessons, we calculated a category mean score for each teacher to examine the differences between the different categories. This also provided an opportunity to examine the extent to which the history teachers demonstrated historical contextualisation and engaged students in historical contextualisation processes. Finally, we analysed the videotaped lessons to identify examples that illustrate our findings.

Results

FAT-HC scores

To examine how the eight history teachers promoted historical contextualisation in their lessons, we present the observers' mean FAT-HC scores and the ICCs in Table 3. The mean average measures ICC was .88 and this was .60 for the mean single measures ICC.

Most teachers obtained similar FAT-HC scores in their different lessons except Kim, Anna, and Nick. If FAT-HC scores >2.00 denote a positive verdict and scores <2.00 denote a negative verdict, no teacher in the sample obtained a positive mean FAT-HC score, which was the opposite of what we expected.

Demonstrating historical contextualisation and engaging students in historical contextualisation

To examine possible differences between the categories, we present the observers' mean category scores (based on two lessons) in Table 4. The highest scores were achieved in not using anachronisms and presenting the past as progress (category 7, mean score = 3.59) and reconstructing a historical context (category 1, mean score = 2.18). The observers almost never noticed the use of anachronisms (i.e. something or someone that is not in its correct historical or chronological context) or that the past was presented as progress. The lowest mean category scores were achieved in enhancing the use of the historical context to explain historical events (category 6, mean score = 1.24) and enhancing historical empathy among students (category 4, mean score = 1.25).

Interestingly, as displayed in Table 4, Bob and Kim achieved the highest scores in all categories, which demonstrate the engagement of the students in historical

Table 3. Mean FAT-HC scores and ICCs of the observed lessons (maximum score = 4.00).

Teacher	Educational track	Lesson topic	Students (n)	Students' age	Mean FAT-HC score* (SD)	ICC** (single)
Lisa	1. General Higher Secondary Education	Renaissance	26	16–17	1.98 (0.14)	.94 (.76)
	2. General Higher Secondary Education	Western Colonialism	27	15–16	1.97 (0.26)	.88 (.59)
Bob	1. Pre-university Education	Cold War	30	14–15	1.89 (0.17)	.85 (.54)
	2. Pre-university Education	Cold War	29	14–15	1.87 (0.26)	.87 (.58)
Nick	1. General Higher Secondary Education	Second World War	28	16–17	1.93 (0.16)	.91 (.68)
	2. General Higher Secondary Education	Monotheism	26	15–16	1.83 (0.15)	.90 (.65)
Kim	1. General Higher Secondary Education	Enlightenment	25	15–16	1.96 (0.42)	.81 (.47)
	2. General Higher Secondary Education	Democratic Revolutions	25	15–16	1.80 (0.35)	.84 (.52)
Anna	1. General Higher Secondary Education	Dutch Republic	26	15–16	1.87 (0.19)	.83 (.50)
	2. Pre-university Education	Ancient Greece	29	15–16	1.71 (0.19)	.88 (.60)
John	1. General Higher Secondary Education	Investiture Controversy	16	15–16	1.76 (0.14)	.91 (.67)
	2. General Higher Secondary Education	Late Middle Ages cities	13	15–16	1.73 (0.07)	.91 (.67)
Mark	1. General Higher Secondary Education	Second World War	28	15–16	1.75 (0.07)	.94 (.76)
	2. Pre-university Education	Alexander the Great	23	15–16	1.74 (0.10)	.90 (.63)
Dylan	1. General Higher Secondary Education	Enlightenment	25	15–16	1.66 (0.13)	.81 (.46)
	2. General Higher Secondary Education	Slavery	31	15–16	1.65 (0.11)	.87 (.58)

*Mean score of five observers. **Average measures ICCs, in parentheses the single measures ICCs.

Table 4. Observers' mean scores based on two lessons (maximum score = 4.00).

Teacher	Lisa (SD)		Bob (SD)		Nick (SD)		Kim (SD)		Anna (SD)		John (SD)		Mark (SD)		Dylan (SD)		Mean category score (SD)	
	Age																	
Years' work experience																		
1. Reconstructing context		22	45	63	41	17	1	27	30	5	37	8	14					
2. Reconstructing context (students)																		
3. Enhancing empathy																		
4. Enhancing empathy (students)																		
5. Contextualise to explain																		
6. Contextualise to explain (students)																		
7. No anachronisms/past as progress																		
8. Raising awareness of presentism																		
Mean FAT-HC score (SD)																		

Table 5. Differences between demonstrating and engaging historical contextualisation processes.

Category	Teacher demonstrates (I)	Teacher engages (J)	Difference (I – J)
Reconstructing context	2.18	1.56	.62
Enhancing empathy	1.55	1.25	.30
Contextualise to explain	1.85	1.24	.61
Mean	1.86	1.35	.51

contextualisation (categories 2, 4, 6). Compared to the other teachers, they seemed to engage students more when reconstructing a historical context, promoting historical empathy, and explaining historical events. Lisa is also interesting because she obtained the highest scores for the categories 1, 3, and 5 (demonstrating historical contextualisation) but the lowest scores in the same categories when engaging students in historical contextualisation (categories 2, 4, and 6).

For the categories *reconstructing the historical context*, *enhancing historical empathy*, and *using the historical context to explain historical events*, we made a distinction between the items focusing on demonstrating historical contextualisation by a teacher (category 1, 3, and 5) and items focusing on engaging students in historical contextualisation processes (category 2, 4, and 6). Table 5 presents the differences between demonstrating and engaging students in historical contextualisation processes. As expected, the teachers paid less attention to engaging students in historical contextualisation processes in the lessons.

Examples of historical contextualisation

For each category, we use examples from the videotaped lessons to illustrate our findings in more detail. The examples provide more qualitative insights into how historical contextualisation was promoted by the teachers, in the missed opportunities of the teachers and in the differences between high and low scoring teachers.

Reconstructing the context

Lisa and Nick obtained the highest scores in demonstrating the reconstruction of the historical context. These teachers considered the different frames of reference (i.e. chronological, spatial, sociopolitical, socio-economic, and socialcultural) in each lesson when reconstructing the historical context of a historical event. For example, Lisa addressed the different frames of reference when discussing Western European colonies in the twentieth century. To explain the colonies' struggle for independence, she reconstructed the historical context at the beginning of the lesson:

It started 400 years ago; you should go back 400 years to understand the colonies' struggle for independence. Around 1600, different European countries wished to buy cheap spices. At first, the European countries would make economic agreements with the locals. An example is the Dutch East India Company, which traded often with Dutch India and other Asian countries. However, the merchants stayed on the coast and did not try to change, for example, the locals' religion or government. So, what you see [points at a world map] is that the Dutch travelled to Asia but they stayed along the coast and not inland. But around 1800, there was a change due to the Industrial Revolution in Europe. Different European countries needed more colonies for their raw minerals and to sell their products. In order to do so, they needed more political and economic influence in the colonies.

Interestingly, although the teachers in the sample used time indicators several times (FAT-HC item 4), they almost never showed historical events on a timeline (FAT-HC item 6). Moreover, despite the fact that Lisa used a world map in the example, most teachers did not use geographical (historical) maps to reconstruct a spatial dimension. For example, John could have shown a map of Western Europe in the Middle Ages when discussing mediaeval trade to illustrate the different sizes and names of countries compared to the present.

Bob and Kim encouraged the students the most to reconstruct the historical context. For example, Kim asked the students to reconstruct the historical context of the democratic revolutions instead of reconstructing the historical context herself:

- Kim: The Dutch Revolution. If you look at the specific time when it happened, why is that name strange?
- Student A: The Netherlands did not yet exist at that time.
- Kim: What was the name of the Netherlands back then?
- Student A: The Dutch Republic.
- Kim: Excellent. And what was the relationship between the Enlightenment and the Democratic Revolutions?
- Student B: They started thinking about the best type of government, and they wished to be independent in the case of the American Revolution.
- Kim: and what is the relationship with the Enlightenment? How did the people of the Enlightenment view society?
- Student C: They wanted equality between people.

Lisa, who obtained the highest score in reconstructing the historical context by herself (demonstrating), obtained a far lower score in encouraging students to reconstruct the historical context. This may have been caused by the fact that she did ask questions in her lessons but often answered these questions herself. For example, she asked in one lesson: "Why did the Netherlands and other European countries want so many colonies? What were the reasons?" She, however, answered these questions herself instead of asking the students to provide an answer. The other teachers in the sample also answered their own questions. Moreover, Lisa could have asked the students to create a timeline with historical events relating to Western colonialism from 1600 to 1800 to create a chronological context instead of providing the chronological context herself.

Historical empathy

Lisa and Dylan used historical empathy the most in their lessons, particularly by presenting historical agents relevant to the historical topic under study. For example, when talking about the consequences of the French Revolution, Dylan explained and described the life and role of Napoleon. When explaining eighteenth-century slavery, he described the life of a 14-year-old slave who worked on a plantation to illustrate the contextual circumstances. Compared to the other teachers, Lisa moved herself into the past often, for example, to explain why the Netherlands needed colonies:

If I had a textile factory and I made a lot of coats, then I needed, first of all, a lot of cotton. So where did I get my cotton? Secondly, if I produce 5000 coats a day and almost everybody in my own country already wore my coats, where could I sell my coats?

Bob also provided an interesting option for using historical empathy to explain historical phenomena. Instead of explaining the differences between communism and capitalism himself when talking about the beginning of the Cold War, Bob asked his students to imagine that they were blindfolded and dropped into an unknown country. Next, he asked his students to remove the imaginary blindfold and asked them to describe how they would know if they were in a communist or capitalist country:

- Bob: What do you have to notice? Where do you look?
- Student A: The buildings. In a communist country, the buildings look very similar.
- Student B: Maybe the differences between people?
- Student C: Communism does not focus on making profit; capitalism does.
- Bob: And how could you see this?
- Student C: The cars, the communist countries might drive the same car, often Ladas.
- Bob: And why is that?
- Student C: The government owned the factories and why does the government need to produce different cars?

Kim encouraged her students to practise historical empathy the most. She was the only teacher in the sample who explicitly used a historical empathy task. When explaining eighteenth-century child labour, she divided her class into dyads, and each dyad was instructed to empathise with a different historical agent living in the eighteenth century – for example, an 8-year old child, a factory owner and a politician. The central task was to reason whether the historical agent was against or in favour of child labour.

Mark did not engage his students in historical empathy at all. When he taught his students about the Second World War and the rise of Hitler, he could have, for example, described a young German man who was unsure as to which political party he would vote for in 1930 and asked his students to empathise and reason if the man had voted for the Nazi party. In his other lesson, he centralised a historical agent (Alexander the Great), but he never asked his students to reason as to how Alexander the Great's motivation and beliefs affected his actions.

Using the context to explain historical events

Compared to the other teachers, Lisa and Nick made more use of the historical context to explain historical events. They not only reconstructed the historical context but also used historical context knowledge to compare phenomena or presented different perspectives on a historical event. For example, Nick used historical context knowledge of the Ancient Period, such as time indicators (e.g. 63 B.C., the first century), a geographical context (e.g. map of the Middle East and the Roman Empire) and the political and social-cultural circumstances (e.g. the differences between monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Judaism and the polytheistic Roman religion) to explain the Roman persecution of Jews and Christians.

Bob and Kim encouraged their students to use their historical context knowledge the most. Interestingly, this happened the most when presenting and discussing historical

sources. For example, Bob presented a 1950 Russian cartoon displaying American insects that were raiding Soviet Union territory. He asked his students to use their historical context knowledge (e.g. the Cold War climate, the Marshall Plan) to examine and interpret the cartoon.

- Bob: All right, who knows when this cartoon was made?
- Student A: The source states 1950.
- Bob: Yes, 1950. Which important historical events took place around 1950?
- Student B: The Korean War.
- Bob: Correct, but think again. Which historical event could be related to the source?
- Student C: The Marshall Plan?
- Bob: Yes, but how is that related to the source? How did the Americans experience the Marshall Plan?
- Student C: As something good. They wanted to help other people who needed help after the Second World War.
- Bob: All right. And how could the Russians have viewed the Marshall Plan?
- Student C: As something negative.
- Bob: But it was something good, was it not? You cannot be angry at something that is good, can you?
- Student C: Yeah, but the Soviet-Union viewed it as unwanted interference. The Russians thought that the United States tried to influence European countries.
- Bob: Perfect. And who knows what this cartoon means?
- Student D: I see insects that are eating all the Soviet Union's food. I think the insects represent the Americans plundering the Soviet Union. I think the creator of the cartoon might be Russian.
- Bob: Why?
- Student D: The Americans are negatively displayed as imperialists who try to enlarge their influence in Europe and the Soviet-Union.

Lisa and Nick obtained high scores for demonstrating historical contextualisation in this category; however, they did not engage students much in using knowledge of the historical context to explain historical phenomena. For example, instead of explaining how the Roman persecution of Jews and Christians originated, Nick could have provided the students with historical sources addressing the different frames of reference to reconstruct a historical context and formulate an answer to how the Roman persecution of Jews and Christians originated.

Anachronisms and the past as progress

The observers never observed the use of anachronisms (i.e. something or someone that is not in its correct historical or chronological context) by the teachers. Moreover, the teachers generally did not present the past as progress (i.e. the present is better than the past). Compared to the other teachers, Kim did make remarks a few times (e.g. "nowadays we have it a lot better") indicating that the present is better than the past. However, this category obtained by far the highest observation scores, indicating that the teachers in the sample could not improve much in this category.

Raising awareness of the students' present-oriented perspectives

Anna and Lisa paid the most attention to preventing presentism among the students. An important item in this category is that teachers present learning strategies for historical contextualisation to prevent presentism (FAT-HC item 40). Anna was the only teacher who explicitly taught her students a learning strategy by guiding them to consider different frames of reference when examining a historical event. For example, she taught her students to examine the political, economic, and sociocultural circumstances of prehistoric hunter gatherers step-by-step. By teaching her students to approach a historical phenomenon this way, the chance that they view historical events and historical agents' actions from a present-oriented perspective decreases because the students interpret and examine phenomena in their own time and circumstances.

Moreover, an important FAT-HC item of this category is "the teacher uses historical tension". A teacher could present a problem or case that students find difficult to explain due to their possible present-oriented perspectives. It was striking that none of the teachers in the sample explicitly used historical tension to trigger possible present-oriented perspectives among the students. There were often missed opportunities to do so – for example, when Mark discussed the rise of Hitler in Germany in the 1930s, he could have asked his students to explain why so many Germans voted for his political party. This gave him the opportunity to evaluate their answers: could they explain the rise of Hitler (using historical context knowledge) or were they not able to explain this because they viewed the past from a present-oriented perspective (e.g. Hitler killed millions of people)?

Conclusions and discussion

The aim of this study was to explore how history teachers promoted historical contextualisation in their classrooms. Using the FAT-HC, two lessons from eight history teachers were observed by trained raters, yielding 16 different lessons in total.

Our first hypothesis was that teachers demonstrate historical contextualisation in their lessons because an important aim of the Dutch history curriculum is for students to be able to use their acquired historical overview knowledge to perform historical contextualisation (Board of Examinations 2017). In contrast to our expectations, the overall results indicated that most teachers did not often demonstrate historical contextualisation in their classrooms. None of the teachers in the sample obtained a mean FAT-HC score >2.00. The highest scores could be found in the categories focusing on not using anachronisms and presenting the past as progress (mean score = 3.59) and the category focusing on reconstructing the historical context (mean score = 2.18). All other categories obtained mean scores <2.00, with the category focusing on promoting the use of historical empathy among students (mean score = 1.25) and the category on promoting the use of the historical context (mean score = 1.24) displaying the lowest scores.

The second hypothesis was that the teachers did not often engage students in historical contextualisation processes. As expected, we found a mean score of 1.35 in the categories focusing on engaging students in historical contextualisation compared to a mean score of 1.86 in the categories focusing on demonstrating historical contextualisation. This finding is in line with research, which illustrates that history teachers

focus on covering content knowledge and less on creating opportunities to promote historical thinking and reasoning (Barton and Levstik 2003; Saye 2013).

Research suggests three possible reasons for the differences between the desired instruction methods (i.e. engaging students in historical reasoning competencies) and daily classroom practice (i.e. focusing on the transfer of historical content knowledge). Scholars such as Grant and Gradwell (2010) and Meuwissen (2016) argue that the first reason may be contextual factors, such as state tests and history textbooks. A second reason may be an ineffective classroom climate (Martell 2013; Virta 2002), and a final reason may be the “problem of enactment” (Kennedy 2016) since research indicates that (student) teachers want to teach historical reasoning competencies but do not know how to transfer their beliefs into classroom action (Wansink, Akkerman, and Wubbels 2016). Since contextualisation plays an important role in the Dutch formal exam programme and since most teachers in the sample had an effective pedagogical classroom climate, the problem of enactment appears the most relevant. If our findings also appear in studies with more participants, future research should focus on helping teachers overcome the problem of enactment, for example, by developing and testing effective and activating instructional tools to teach historical contextualisation. To examine the problem of enactment in more detail, future research should also include the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and their historical contextualisation practices. Using belief interviews (e.g. Richardson et al. 1991; Tuithof 2017) or surveys (e.g. Stipek et al. 2001) in combination with FAT-HC observations can provide useful insights for developing teacher professionalisation programmes for historical contextualisation.

An important limitation of our study is that we conducted exploratory research among only eight history teachers and observed only two lessons from each teacher. Future research should therefore examine whether the findings of this study also appear among larger samples of teachers and lessons. Moreover, we only used classroom observations. Using other methods, such as student questionnaires and teachers’ self-reports (Muijs 2006), could also contribute to increasing insights as to how teachers promote historical contextualisation in classrooms. The unit of analysis was also the whole lesson with a focus on teacher behaviour. Comparison of teacher lectures, teacher–student interactions, and student discussion lesson fragments could provide more insight into how historical contextualisation is promoted during different lesson activities.

In this study, we focused exclusively on what history teachers might or might not do in history lessons regarding the teaching of historical contextualisation. Therefore, we did not investigate history teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). The relationship between teachers’ PCK and their ability to promote historical contextualisation is, however, relevant and should be included in future research to answer important questions. Building upon the work of Monte-Sano (2011) researches can, for example, examine how the teaching of historical contextualisation relates with teachers’ understanding of the discipline, their ability to design lessons that represent the discipline accurately, their capacity to recognise students’ disciplinary thinking and their capacity to respond to students in the classroom. The relationship between lesson topics and forms of historical contextualisation was also beyond the scope of this study. Further research is needed to answer the following question: Do teachers use different historical contextualisation teaching strategies depending on the historical topic? Stimulated

recall (e.g. Lyle 2003) where teachers think aloud when watching their own lessons could provide insights into the relationship between historical topics and historical contextualisation.

Despite these limitations, our study showed the possibilities of using the FAT-HC to operationalise history teachers' specific professionalisation needs since it provides domain-specific insights into teachers' strengths and weaknesses. For example, an optimistic finding is that the observers almost never noticed the use of anachronisms or presenting the past as progress by teachers. By contrast, teachers can, for example, engage students more in historical contextualisation by creating opportunities where students use their historical context knowledge to explain, compare, or evaluate historical phenomena. Mariott (2001) and Ball and Forzani (2009) noted that these insights are important to educating and professionalising (history) educators.

We conclude with some practical implications. Our findings illustrate that teachers often answered questions themselves. Instead, teachers could create opportunities for students to answer questions. Furthermore, despite the fact that teachers provided time indicators (e.g. year, century, period) when explaining historical phenomena, they almost never displayed a timeline to establish a chronological context or encouraged the students to create timelines. Additionally, geographical maps were rarely used to establish a spatial context. To enhance historical empathy, teachers should not only present a historical agent but also consider, for example, the agents' motives, beliefs, and knowledge (Endacott and Pelekanos 2015). This was often not the case in the observed lessons.

To engage students more in historical contextualisation, teachers have to remember not to "showcase" their own knowledge and skills. It is important to let the students do the work and make mistakes and to help them in the processes of historical contextualisation. For example, it is suggested to not only display a timeline but also instruct students to create (different) timelines themselves. It is also important to provide historical sources that address the different frames of reference and ask students to reconstruct a context on their own to answer evaluative and explanatory questions. The History Assessments of Thinking (HATs) on historical contextualisation, which are developed by the Stanford History Education Group, are promising tools to engage students more in historical contextualisation and can be used for formative assessment and feedback on this historical reasoning competency (Breakstone, Smith, and Wineburg 2013). Discussing historical sources in classroom discussions might also be an effective strategy since we found that this often engaged students in historical contextualisation processes. Moreover, teachers could focus more on triggering possible present-oriented perspectives among students. Presenting the past as strange (e.g. child labour and the poor working conditions in the eighteenth century compared to the daily life of a child currently) could promote awareness of the differences and connections between the past and present (Huijgen and Holthuis 2015; Seixas and Morton 2013). Furthermore, the teachers in our sample did not explicitly teach students how to perform historical contextualisation. To improve in this area, teachers could use the scaffolds developed by Reisman and Wineburg (2008) and Havekes et al. (2012).

To help history teachers promote historical contextualisation, teachers could participate in professional development programmes, including pre- and post-observation interviews and opportunities to collaboratively develop lesson activities guided by

experts. Lesson study, including the use of the FAT-HC, which focuses on collaborative planning, teaching, observing, and discussion of lessons (cf. Lewis, Perry, and Murata 2006), could help teachers design effective learning tasks. Recently, Korthagen (2017) described an interesting approach called “Professionalization development 3.0”, which might help to overcome the problem of enactment. This is a bottom-up approach that centralises the teachers’ potential where the teacher sets relevant (personal) learning goals instead of dealing solely with expert knowledge (top-down approach). As the results of this study show, the teaching of historical contextualisation is a complex process, but if teachers, teacher educators, and researchers work together to design effective instructional tools and specific professionalisation programmes on historical contextualisation, this might result in an increase in students’ ability to perform historical contextualisation.

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Appendix A. Framework for Analysing the Teaching of Historical Contextualisation (FAT-HC) Explanatory notes 1: weak, 2: more weak than strong, 3: more strong than weak, 4: strong

The teacher...	1	2	3	4
Activates relevant prior knowledge				
Shows visual material				
Uses historical sources				
Gives time indicators regarding phenomena				
Gives the duration of phenomena				
Shows phenomena on a timeline				
Gives geographical/spatial indicators regarding phenomena				
Shows phenomena on a geographical map				
Appoints political/governance characteristics at the time of phenomena				
Appoints economic characteristics at the time of phenomena				
Appoints sociocultural characteristics at the time of phenomena				
Appoints causes and consequences of phenomena				
Appoints change and continuity regarding phenomena				
The students...	1	2	3	4
Give time indicators regarding phenomena				
Give the duration of phenomena				
Give geographical/spatial indicators regarding phenomena				
Appoint political/governance characteristics at the time of phenomena				
Appoint economic characteristics at the time of phenomena				
Appoint sociocultural characteristics at the time of phenomena				
Appoint sociocultural characteristics at the time of phenomena				
Appoint change and continuity regarding phenomena				
The teacher...	1	2	3	4
Centralises a historical agent				
Moves self into the past to explain phenomena (if I..)				
Outlines a recognisable role for students to foster empathy (as a businessman/like a father)				
The students...	1	2	3	4

(Continued)

(Continued).

The teacher...	1	2	3	4
Make affective/emotional connections with historical agents				
Consider the role of the historical agent to explain historical decisions				
State what they would have decided regarding historical decisions				
The teacher...	1	2	3	4
Compares phenomena with other times				
Compares phenomena with other places				
Places phenomena in long-term developments				
Outlines phenomena from different perspectives				
The students...	1	2	3	4
Compare phenomena with other times				
Compare phenomena with other places				
Place phenomena in long-term developments				
Outline phenomena from different perspectives				
The teacher...	1	2	3	4
Does <i>not</i> use anachronisms				
Does <i>not</i> present the past as progress				
Creates historical tension (the past as different)				
Presents conflicting historical sources				
Presents learning strategies for historical contextualisation				